R8780-1

PRRC emerging trends

Published by the Princeton Religion Research Center

May 1992

Volume 14, No. 5 ISSN 0889-8936

# Denominational Switching Is Common in U.S.

A superficial view of the statistics on religious life in America would suggest that there is little change over the decades. That impression ignores, however, the constant denominational shifting that can occur among the religious faithful as they switch faiths and denominations as their beliefs or circumstances change.

About one adult in four (23 percent) has changed faiths or denominations at least once from the religion in which he was raised. For the most part, these changes have benefited the Protestant denominations. Among those who have ever changed, there are nine times as many who are now Protestants (81 percent) as who have become Catholics (9 percent). The smaller Protestant denominations frequently are the beneficiaries of these changes.

Within the Protestant faith, the mainline denominations appear to have lost the most members to other followings. Baptists (19 percent) have been hit hardest in this respect, followed by Methodists (11 percent), and Presbyterians (6 percent). Roman Catholics also show heavy losses, accounting for 18 percent of those who changed to other religions. One person in 20 had no religious identity prior to his current affiliation.

Changing often appears to be an active experience. Switchers (50 percent) are slightly more likely than non-switchers to view themselves as "born again" or evangelical Christians. The switchers also are more likely than non-switchers to see religion as very important in their lives, by a margin of 71 percent to 58 percent.

The switchers are only slightly more likely than non-switchers to claim membership in a church (78 percent vs. 75 percent), but are somewhat more likely to have attended that church recently (48 percent vs. 42 percent).

When asked specifically why they changed their religion, 14 percent of those switching denominations or faiths positively stated they preferred the religious stance of another church, while 7 percent were in a negative frame of mind and said they found the perspectives of their previous church wanting. One in 20 (5 percent) said a religious experience led to their changing faiths or denominations.

Intermarriage with a person of another faith or denomination led to one change in four (24 percent), and an additional 10 percent of those who switched cited the influence of friends, relatives or children.

For another one in 10 (11 percent), changes were made because of relocation to a new community or because the new church was more convenient to attend.

The findings are based on telephone interviews with a randomly selected national sample of 1,002 adults 18 years of age and older, conducted April 9 – 12, 1992. For results based on this size, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 3 percentage points in either direction. The table below shows affiliation for total adults and for "switchers" (those who have ever changed).

### Switchers

*What is your religious preference? What denomination is that?*

| | Total % | Switchers % |
|---|---|---|
| **Total Protestant** | 64 | 81 |
| Methodist | 11 | 14 |
| Southern Baptist | 10 | 10 |
| Other Baptist | 9 | 8 |
| Lutheran | 8 | 6 |
| Presbyterian | 7 | 12 |
| Episcopalian | 2 | 4 |
| Other | 12 | 25 |
| Unspecified | 5 | 2 |
| **Roman Catholic** | 28 | 9 |
| **Jewish** | 2 | – |
| **Orthodox church** | 1 | 1 |
| **Mormon** | 1 | 1 |
| **Other** | 4 | 8 |

# Princeton Religion Index

By one important benchmark, religiousness in America appears to have arrested its long-term decline and to have started to regain some of its previous strength.

The benchmark, known as the Princeton Religion Index, is an ongoing measurement by the Princeton Religion Research Center of eight key religious beliefs and practices of the American public. By combining factors such as belief in God; confidence in religion, the church and the clergy; and church membership levels, an overall picture of religion in America can be obtained. Currently, the index stands at 656 — a modest increase over the period of the past three years when it had reached an all-time low. On the Index a perfect score would be "1000;" an obviously unobtainable goal that could be reached only when every single person in the country made a total commitment to God and church.

The decade of the 1980s saw a slow downward trend in the Princeton Religion Index that bottomed out in 1988, stayed low for the next two years, but finally demonstrated renewed strength in 1991.

Modern American religious belief and practice attained its peak during the 1950s and set an all-time high mark of 745 in 1960, before the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s took their toll on many institutions, including religion. Further erosion in religious practices and confidence in church and clergy took place in the 1980s as a result of the televangelist scandals and probably because of various conflicts between laity and church leadership during the period.

The final results for 1991 suggest there may be a new upswing in religious belief and practice, as measured by the index. Here is how the eight individual components of the Princeton Religion Index fared in 1991, compared to the past.

— Belief in God or a universal spirit is unusually high in America, with levels of belief ranging from 94 percent to 99 percent over the past five decades.

— Since 1947 nine adults in 10 or more say there is a religious denomination or faith that they prefer. A preference was expressed by 89 percent in 1991, unchanged from the previous year.

— Opinion of the relevance of religion or of its ability to answer today's problems has ranged widely over the decades from a high of 81 percent in 1957 to a low of 56 percent in 1984. In 1991, six in 10 of those interviewed (60 percent) felt religion answers today's problems. This marked a decline of three percentage points when compared to the previous year's results.

— Gallup has been questioning people since 1937 on whether they are now members of a church, synagogue or similar place of worship. Claims of membership have ranged from a high of 76 percent in 1947 to a low of 65 percent in 1988 and in 1990. In 1991, membership rose three percentage points to 68 percent of the adult population.

— Confidence in the church or "organized religion" remained steady for many years, but suffered in the wake of the televangelist scandals in the late 1980s when it dropped from 66 percent of the people in 1985 who said they had a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence to just 52 percent who still expressed confidence in 1985. Confidence has been rising ever since, and in 1991 the church held the confidence of 57 percent of the populace.

— Similarly, members of the clergy have not been immune to the affects of adverse publicity, as positive ratings of their honesty and ethics dropped from 67 percent to 55 percent between 1985 and 1989. A slight improvement was noted in 1991, with 57 percent expressing their confidence in the clergy.

— A majority of Americans in the past 10 years have rated religion as being very important in their lives. In 1991, religion was rated important by 58 percent of adults — the highest measurement this key factor has received since 1972. Occasional measurements on the same question during earlier decades indicated that the sense of importance probably was stronger in the past. The highest mark was attained in the early 1950s when three Americans in four (75 percent) said religion was very important in their lives.

— Gallup has been questioning people since 1939 about their attendance at church or synagogue in the seven-day period preceding the time of interview. Attendance was higher in earlier years, but during the past 10 years average attendance has shown little fluctuation. In 1991, 42

percent of the adult population could be found at a place of worship during a typical week, a two percentage-point rise in attendance over the results for the previous year.

The findings for the individual component questions of the index are based on up to 40,000 interviews with representative nationwide samples of men and women, ages 18 and older, taken throughout 1991. For findings based on samples of this size, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 1 percentage point in either direction. Index figures for some years prior to 1980 are statistical estimates made from existing scattered data.

### Index 1980 – 1991

| | |
|---|---|
| 1991 | 656 |
| 1990 | 651 |
| 1989 | 651 |
| 1988 | 650 |
| 1987 | 662 |
| 1986 | 661 |
| 1985 | 684 |
| 1984 | 669 |
| 1983 | 669 |
| 1982 | 672 |
| 1981 | 681 |
| 1980 | 681 |

### Religion Index — by Decades

| | |
|---|---|
| 1991 | 656 |
| 1981 | 681 |
| 1971 | 695 |
| 1961 | 741 |
| 1951 | 742 |
| 1941 | 730 |

## 50 Years Ago

- 78% of Americans thought women should receive equal pay for equal work.
- 55% thought local liquor regulations were too lax.
- Only 8% of Australians favored opening places of amusement to soldiers on Sunday.
- A majority of Americans (55 percent) approved of weekly V.D. exams of prostitutes near army bases, but 45% wanted the police to drive them out.
- Only 6% of Americans viewed the German *people* as their chief enemy.
- One person in 10 read the Bible every day. One person in 20reported more frequent Bible reading since Pearl Harbor. The most popular books of the New Testament were the Gospels, Revelations, and Paul's Letters. The Psalms were the first choice of those who favored the Old Testament, followed by Genesis, Proverbs, Ruth, Job, and the Prophets.
- Two persons in three (68 percent) felt they had a clear idea of what World War II was about. Most said we were fighting for freedom, liberty, and democracy, or to lick the Axis. Few mentioned "the Four Freedoms" and even fewer could name them.
- The establishment of a world organization to maintain the future peace of the world was favored by 64% of the people.

## Black Professionals Move Into Non-Religion Jobs

Blacks have made great strides over the past 20 years in entering white-collar fields, according to an analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics presented recently by *The Wall Street Journal.*

Ten of 11 fields showed dramatic gains in the number of black practitioners that ranged from a 45 percent increase in elementary and secondary school teachers to a jump of 479 percent in the number of black accountants. Even these statistics were dwarfed by the growth in the number of black colonels in the U.S. Army, who registered a 1,340 percent increase over the period.

Indeed, the only group not showing an increase was the black clergy whose membership declined 28 percent between 1972 and 1991.

The Journal offered no interpretation of this decline, but it would seem to us likely that in 1972 the clergy probably drew more members than now because it was one of the few, if only, professional occupations to which aspiring blacks could gain ready access.

# Hats Off To The Clergy!

With all the problems of society laid at the door of churches, and with members of the clergy being increasingly expected to be all things to all people, it is time to take a moment to remind ourselves of the esteem in which churches and the clergy are held in America and to say "hats off" to these unsung heroes.

Modern clergy are expected to be preachers, teachers, administrators, evangelizers, students, social workers, counselors, friends, therapists, confessors, and pastors — on call 24 hours a day.

The grades they receive for their performance, as measured by Gallup Poll results over the years have been consistently high.

• Organized religion consistently ranks high or highest on the list of institutions that enjoy the confidence of the American people.

• The clergy as a profession, despite the often bad press they receive because of the wayward actions of a few of their members, have always ranked first or second among the professions for their ethics and standards of behavior.

• Three church members in four would give their pastors an "A" (44 percent) or a "B" (33 percent) for the overall quality of their work. While some are considered average, only 3 percent are thought to be failures. More specifically the majority of the clergy receive high grades for the way they are dealing with community problems (52 percent) and for meeting the public's spiritual needs (61 percent).

• When it comes to entrusting institutions to spend charitable funds wisely and humanely, churches head the list of institutions receiving the most money and the greatest amount of voluntary efforts. Studies by the Independent Sector, a philanthropic umbrella group, have shown that churches receive the majority of charitable efforts that are funneled back to the community in tens of billions of dollars and many millions of hours of volunteer services.

• The clergy are ranked first as contributing to the general good of society. They are ranked second only to medical doctors as the occupation enjoying the greatest prestige. The price they pay, however, is that the clergy also are often seen as being among those who have the greatest stress in their working lives.

• Local churches under the leadership of the clergy have been recognized by nine in 10 Americans as trying to improve life in our troubled inner cities. Local churches are at the top of the list of 24 different types of organizations that are seen by the public as trying to improve life in our cities.

• A 1990 George H. Gallup International Institute study for the National Civic league found that churches were at the top of the list of institutions inspiring the confidence of the public for their ability to solve local community problems. Nearly six persons in 10 (57 percent) said they had a great deal or quite a bit of confidence in these efforts by their local churches, synagogues, or other local religious institutions.

### Many thanks but low pay

While their problems have multiplied and people express both their need for and appreciation of good works by clergy, compensation has not kept pace. According to a study by Christianity Today, Inc., clergy salaries rose an average of only 7.4 percent between 1988 and 1991, less than half the inflation rate. In other words, while members of the clergy may have received token raises in recent years, on average their actual buying power has decreased. Typically, the average salary is now $21,940. Total compensation is $37,260, including housing allowances, but even this gain can be illusory as unlike homeowners, the clergy seldom retain any equity from their housing.

Unfortunately for the clergy, many members of the laity think low salaries are appropriate and part of the self-sacrificial role of those who take religious orders. A recent Gallup survey found 37 percent of Americans believe that the clergy should be paid less than $30,000 annually. In the same survey, six persons in 10 or more thought by comparison, other professionals such as physicians, lawyers, engineers and pharmacists should be paid well over $40,000 annually. Even plumbers are rated as more deserving than clergy when it comes to financial compensation for their efforts.

The only hope for the clergy that they be paid their true worth is found among America's teenagers who consider the clergy among the most underpaid professionals in the country. Half of the teens (51 percent) interviewed on a 1989 Gallup Youth Survey said the clergy were underpaid, particularly when compared to physicians and executives, not to mention rock superstars, professional athletes, and U.S. senators and congressmen.

*Reprinted from The Gallup Religion Poll.*

# The Social Gospel

## *Recent survey findings on social and moral issues*

### How Teens View the Women's Movement

*In your opinion, has the women's movement done a good job in improving women's lives, gone too far, or not far enough?*

| | |
|---|---|
| Good job | 51% |
| Gone too far | 15 |
| Not gone far enough | 33 |

*Do you think most men in the United States today understand the issues that concern women most, or not?*

| | |
|---|---|
| Understand | 40% |
| Do not understand | 59 |

*Do you think women in the United States have been making gains unfairly at the expense of men, or not?*

| | |
|---|---|
| Unfair gains | 29% |
| Not unfair | 67 |

*(Women only) Do you consider yourself a feminist, or not?*

| | |
|---|---|
| Feminist | 31% |
| Not a feminist | 59 |
| Not sure | 10 |

Gallup Youth Survey 504 teen-agers
December 3 – 12, 1991

### Affirmative action

*Do you believe that where there has been job discrimination against women (blacks) in the past, preference in hiring or promotion should be given to women (blacks) today?*

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes, to women | 49% |
| Yes, to blacks | 39 |

New York Times/CBS Poll 1,673 adults
February 26 – March 1, 1992

### The Homeless

*Do you think that most homeless people are homeless mainly because of their own fault, or are most homeless people homeless mainly because of circumstances beyond their control?*

| | |
|---|---|
| Own fault | 22% |
| Beyond control | 55 |
| Both (volunteered) | 20 |

*Is homelessness something the government can do a lot about, or is homelessness a problem that is beyond government's control?*

| | |
|---|---|
| Can do a lot about | 70% |
| Beyond control | 22 |

*Do you think that when most people see the homeless they feel upset, or do you think that most people have gotten so used to seeing the homeless that they don't feel upset by them?*

| | |
|---|---|
| Feel upset | 42% |
| Don't feel upset | 42 |
| Half and half | 8 |

New York Times/CBS Poll 1,376 adults
January 6 – 8, 1992

*Should federal spending on helping homeless people be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?*

| | |
|---|---|
| Increased | 68% |
| Kept the same | 26 |
| Decreased | 4 |

New York Times/CBS Poll 1,281 adults
January 22 – 25, 1992

### Teens Talk about AIDS and Sex

*Do you think public education efforts to reduce the spread of AIDS among young people should focus more on encouraging them to practice safe sex or more on encouraging them to abstain from sex?*

| | |
|---|---|
| Safe sex | 64% |
| Abstinence | 31 |

*Please tell me how much you support or oppose each of these issues and causes...*

| | |
|---|---|
| Support free condoms to students to prevent the spread of AIDS | 85% |
| Support counseling centers where students can be taught not to have sex until after they are married | 77% |

*As I read off four statements, please tell me which one of the statements best applies to you.*

| | |
|---|---|
| I have changed my behavior because of the risk of AIDS | 23% |
| I am seriously thinking of changing my behavior because of the risk of AIDS | 11 |
| I have not changed my behavior | 34 |
| I do not need to change my behavior | 32 |

Gallup Youth Survey 504 teen-agers
November 20 – 26, 1991

*Advertisement*

# *1992 Religion in America Report*

The soon to be published **Religion in America 1992** report marks the 25™ anniversary of the initiation of these regular and eagerly-awaited publications, which present facts and interpretations of the latest trends in religious beliefs and practices, as well as the public's changing views on the impact of religion on society.

Many of the indicators reported have become the basic standard measurements of organized religion in the United States.

This report will present a detailed analysis of church attendance and membership by key population groups, and by major faiths and denominations. A special commentary by George Gallup, Jr. will set forth the major challenges and growing opportunities facing churches in the immediate years ahead.

If you preach, write, or teach, we sincerely believe you will find this PRRC publication to be a constant aid in your mission.

*Special pre-publication offer:* Those who order **Religion in America 1992** before July 1, will also receive a free copy of **100 Questions and Answers.** Written by George Gallup, Jr. and Sarah Jones, this book contains 100 of the most important questions we have surveyed in the area of religion.

This book, which represents the distillation of many recent Gallup surveys, deals in depth with each of 100 topics — analysis by key demographic groups, trends, background information and tables. Selections include religious belief and ethics, religion and politics, religious experience and spiritual development and commitment. This book will provide important historical trends to supplement the latest information contained in **Religion in America 1992.**

To receive **Religion in America 1992** and your complimentary copy of **100 Questions and Answers** send your check or money order for $30 to Princeton Religion Research Center, 47 Hulfish Street, P.O. Box 389, Princeton, NJ 08542.

EMERGING TRENDS is published monthly except July and August by the PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER. The Center, founded in 1977, is an inter-faith non-denominational organization with headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey. The PRRC specializes in creative actionable research, utilizing the world-wide attitudinal and behavioral facilities of Gallup International. The purpose of the PRRC is to gain better understanding of the nature and depth of religious commitment in the United States and abroad and to explore ways this information can enable religious leaders to promote spiritual growth. A one-year subscription can be obtained for $35.00. Inquire: Publications Department, P.O. Box 389, 47 Hulfish Street, Princeton, NJ 08542 (Telephone 609/921-8112). POSTMASTER: PLEASE NOTIFY US OF ADDRESS CHANGE.

PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER
47 Hulfish Street, Suite 215
P.O. Box 389
Princeton, NJ 08542

First Class
Postage
Paid
Permit No. 175
Plainsboro, NJ 08536

Congressional Info. Serv.
SRI
4520 East West Highway
Bethesda, MD 20814

**First Class Mail**